

Date: 30 December 2011  
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30 December  
2011

## THE TIMES

Bellamy sets Liverpool on recovery path after early misfortune

Liverpool 3 Newcastle United 1 Tony Barrett The question of how **Liverpool** would cope without Luis Suarez was answered in the most affirmative fashion last night as they scored three goals for only the second time this season to condemn Newcastle United to defeat.

In doing so, Kenny Dalglish's side also conjured up a question of their own - how they have managed to cope without Steven Gerrard, who entered the fray as a substitute with the scores level only to turn the game in **Liverpool's** favour with a cameo that once again illustrated his importance to their cause.

Having taken the lead through Daniel's Agger own goal, Newcastle were unable to cope with **Liverpool's** attacking urges, with Craig Bellamy scoring twice before Gerrard got a third to emphasise both his own impact and his team's command.

The measure of **Liverpool's** struggles in front of goal was provided by a single Newcastle player, with Demba Ba having scored more goals this season than the entire squad of players available to Kenny Dalglish for this game. The absence of Suarez, their top scorer, because of a one-game suspension brought further attention to **Liverpool's** weakness and accentuated the pressure on Andy Carroll finally to live up to the expectations that come as standard with a [pounds sterling]35 million transfer fee.

**Liverpool** dominated the opening exchanges but the only shooting opportunities of note fell to Charlie Adam, whose aim was errant, and Stewart Downing, who could only force Tim Krul into the most routine of saves.

In keeping with **Liverpool's** season, their failure to turn supremacy into goals put them in a compromising situation and Newcastle became the latest opponents to take advantage of their profligacy when they took the lead after 25 minutes.

Yohan Cabaye met Ryan Taylor's inswinging cross with a deft header that took touches off Ba and Daniel Agger before finding the net. It was Agger's contact that was decisive, though, the deflection off his right shoulder leaving Pepe Reina stranded.

The fact that they had conceded will have been enough to strike fear into **Liverpool** hearts, especially given their failure to score more than once at home in more than three months. Such concerns were eased within four minutes of going behind, however, as a player returned to haunt his former club.

It was not, as the script might have demanded, Carroll who brought the scores level. Instead it was Bellamy who put the provided an accurate and powerful finishing flourish after Cheik Tiote had only partially cleared Adam's daisy-cutting cross from the right.

Newcastle did not allow the setback to undermine them. Organised defensively by Fabricio Colocchini and given added protection by Tiote, there was a solidity to their play which prevented **Liverpool** from building up a head of steam after Bellamy's goal. Martin Skrtel flashed a header wide from Bellamy's corner but other than that minor scare the visiting team's path to the half-time interval was relatively trouble free.

If there was one concern for Alan Pardew it was **Liverpool's** dominance of the right flank. where Ryan Taylor in particular and Jonas Gutierrez struggled with the attacking thrusts of Downing and Glen Johnson. With both of his left-sided players having been booked during the first half, the Newcastle manager decided to replace Taylor with Davide Santon at halftime as a preventative measure in terms of discipline as much as tactics.

Regardless of Pardew's intervention, Newcastle should have been reduced to ten men shortly after the interval when Cabaye went over the top of the ball in a challenge with Jay Spearing and causing the midfielder player's leg to buckle.

**Liverpool's** anger that Newcastle were not put to a numerical disadvantage was secondary only to their own frustration at Carroll's continuing shortcomings. Picked out by Gerrard, the substitute, with a searching through ball that put him clean through on goal, the forward was let down by the heaviest of touches which allowed Tim Krul to claim possession without even being tested.

**Liverpool** continued to push forward and their ambition was rewarded when they took the lead after 67 minutes when Bellamy's free kick but brushed Danny Simpson on the way past his own goalkeeper.

Newcastle could have equalised immediately but were thwarted when Skrtel cleared off the line to deny Ba what would have been his fifteenth goal this season. That scare reminded **Liverpool** of the fragility of their slender lead and they responded positively with Carroll crashing a thunderous header against the crossbar from Gerrard's expert delivery.

Gerrard's impact on the game was immense, the **Liverpool** captain taking a stranglehold on midfield and establishing himself as his team's attacking hub.

Dalglish may have asked his players not to become over-reliant on Gerrard but the man himself thrives on such responsibility and it was no surprise that he took the game beyond Newcastle with a neat finish after an intelligent run into the box to collect Jordan Henderson's lay-off.

## the guardian

Bellamy breathes life into a Liverpool side without Suarez  
**Liverpool 3**

Bellamy 29 67, Gerrard 78  
 Newcastle Utd 1

Agger 25og

Craig Bellamy scored twice against his former club and Andy Carroll hit the bar in the second half, though no one could stop Steven Gerrard stealing the show with the final **Liverpool** goal in his second game back from injury.

Gerrard was allowed only 30 minutes after being out for a couple of months but even in that short time he showed the drive and invention **Liverpool** have been missing. Kenny Dalglish has promised to use him sparingly until he is fully match fit and on this evidence he can afford to.

**Liverpool** were transformed by their captain and the three points mean they move above Arsenal in the table, going level on points with Chelsea and just outside the top four. Bellamy was withdrawn shortly before the end, departing with angry words for the Newcastle manager, Alan Pardew, after receiving an elbow in the face from Fabricio Colocchini and a cut to his left eye that required stitches.

"I thought we fully deserved the victory," Dalglish said. "It was fantastic to see Steven back to his best but I wouldn't say he changed the game. I thought we were always in control." Bellamy seemed to have calmed down afterwards and dismissed the incident, as did Pardew. "I saw him in the tunnel," said Pardew. "I said: 'What are you having a go at me for? I didn't elbow you.'"

The subplot to this game was not only how Carroll would fare against his old club, Dalglish having been practically forced into giving his pounds 35m centre-forward his second start in a week by the one-match suspension handed to Luis Suarez, but how well Demba Ba would show up for Newcastle. Neither figured prominently in the opening stages. Carroll won applause from the home crowd for winning a couple of aerial challenges as **Liverpool** did most of the early attacking, though it took the intervention of the referee, Lee Probert, who inadvertently dispossessed Gabriel Obertan, to set up the first real shooting opportunity after almost 20 minutes. Charlie Adam, never one to wait to be asked twice, drove over the bar from 20 yards.

Stewart Downing brought a save from Tim Krul a few moments later but, with Carroll effectively playing on his own up front, Newcastle were not having too much difficulty keeping their shape at the back. That looked like becoming more of a problem for the home side when Newcastle went into the lead midway through the first half, though it served to energise **Liverpool** and parity was restored four minutes later. The Newcastle goal came when **Liverpool** were slightly distracted by Haris Vuckic taking a clearance full in the face and deciding to leave the field for treatment. The rest of Newcastle's players played on and Ryan Taylor's cross from the left skimmed Yohan Cabaye's head and was diverted past Jose Reina by the slightest touch from Daniel Agger.

**Liverpool's** response was swift, throwing more players forward into attack and equalising when Adam's cross bounced off Cheik Tiote and fell kindly for Bellamy, who drove a shot through a crowd of players.

Carroll had a chance when a Bellamy free-kick reached him in front of goal in the 55th minute, yet managed to produce a header that looked more like a defensive clearance than an attempt to score.

Dalglish sent on Gerrard for the last half-hour in place of the labouring Adam and he was immediately into the action, crossing from the right touchline for Carroll but finding the target man unable to stay on his feet. The crowd did not mind that too much but there were groans when Gerrard delivered an even better ball four minutes later, only to see Carroll stay onside but effectively pass the ball to Krul with a heavy first touch. Undeterred, even by Newcastle fans chanting "what a waste of money", Carroll could at least say he played a part in **Liverpool's** second goal.

Gerrard seemed likely to take the free-kick when Tiote fouled Agger but Bellamy tried his luck instead, producing a shot that probably would not have beaten Krul but for Carroll getting his sizeable frame right in the goalkeeper's eyeline.

The best of both Carroll and Ba was saved until late. The latter beat Reina with a delicate, angled shot that Martin Skrtel did miraculously well to clear off the line, then Carroll thumped a header against Krul's crossbar from a sumptuous Gerrard cross. Perhaps both men should have scored from inviting opportunities, though there was not much wrong with either effort. All the same Gerrard decided to cut out the middleman for the final goal, running on to Jordan Henderson's pass and coming up with a composed finish to beat Krul from a narrow angle. "I've had a terrible year but I only want to look forward," Gerrard said. "Now I'm back playing again I'll be glad to see the back of 2011."

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## The Mail

### BELLAMY BLAST RESCUES KENNY

Liverpool 3 Newcastle 1

WHEN nobody else is managing to deliver, step forward the guys who have done it all before. e o p y s i e n r e Craig Bellamy, at 32, and Steven Gerrard, 31, may not be the future of Liverpool. That rests with Luis Suarez, who is banned for nine games, and Andy Carroll, who is so out of sorts it is excruciating. But Liverpool's tigerish little Welshman and his club captain know more about the Barclays Premier League than most and last night they scored the goals that gave Liverpool a little hope as they head into 2012. Trailing rather unfortunately to a Daniel Agger own goal midway through the first half, Bellamy dragged Liverpool level with a first-time shot at the Kop end. Then, as Liverpool continued to struggle for fluency with 23 minutes left, Bellamy whipped a free-kick past confused Newcastle goalkeeper Tim Krul to ensure his team registered their first home win since September.

Captain Gerrard, on as a substitute, scored a third with 12 minutes left. That was certainly a welcome sight for Dalglish and indeed England manager Fabio Capello. By that time Bellamy was in the dressing room having treatment for a cut head courtesy of an elbow from Fabrizio Colocchini. He would have heard the roar, though, and will have known that last night he more than played his part.

Reflecting in the programme on his team's season so far -- and more specifically the St Stephen's Day draw at home to Blackburn -- Dalglish bemoaned his team's supposed misfortune. Nevertheless, a home schedule in the Premier League that had seen Liverpool draw with Sunderland, Norwich, Swansea and Blackburn would suggest something fundamental has been wrong.

Only twice had Liverpool scored more than one goal at home -- beating Bolton 3-1 and Wolves 2-1 -- and that really was a remarkable statistic for a squad that includes goalscorers such as Suarez, Carroll and Bellamy and creative talents like Stewart Downing and Charlie Adam. The upside, however, was that Liverpool were approaching the end of 2011 still in touch with the top four. Last night, Dalglish faced the club he managed in the late 1990s without the services of Suarez but with Carroll and Bellamy, a player who has looked so dangerous of late. As expected, club captain Gerrard was on the bench again as he comes back slowly from injury, and there was no place for Jamie Carragher. As the months roll on, this is a sight Liverpool fans will have to get used to.

As for Newcastle, their early progress has stalled somewhat but they still arrived in the rain last night just a point behind their opponents, in seventh place. Yohan Cabaye and Cheick Tioté began the evening. One imagined they would be rather important. Within a minute it appeared as though Bellamy may be about to embarrass his old club as he raced clear on to Adam's pass. He was, however, offside. Bellamy's first touch elicited some boos from the Newcastle end, as did the involvement of not just Carroll and Jose Enrique but also Downing (he once played for Middlesbrough) and Jordan Henderson (once of Sunderland).

Bellamy and Enrique combined well down the left in the 15th minute only for the latter's cross to evade his team-mates. That was soon followed by a Carroll shot that struck one of his own players and a low drive by Downing that Krul gathered low at his left post.

Remarkably, given the way the game had gone, it was Newcastle who took the lead in the 25th minute. There seemed little danger as Haris Vuckic made his way to the touchline for treatment for a blow to the face. But when Ryan Taylor swung in a left wing cross, Cabaye flicked it on and as Demba Ba went up with Daniel Agger, the ball went in off the defender's shoulder.

It really was a peculiar goal but it stirred Liverpool and within five minutes they were level. Two crossed passed in front of Krul's goal without ever looking dangerous but when Adam picked up the scraps on the right in front of the Kop, his low centre was diverted towards the penalty spot by a black and white shirt and Bellamy drove in the equaliser first time with his right foot.

Liverpool looked energised and Dalglish's team almost turned the game upside down when Martin Skrtel headed a corner across goal and inches wide.

Carroll, it had to be said, had a poor first half. It is not enough to say the big Geordie had not received adequate service. It is up to him to find his way into games. Early in the second half, though, attention turned to something more unpleasant than lost form. Liverpool midfielder Jay Spearing reached a loose ball ahead of Cabaye only for the Frenchman to rake his foot down his opponents' lower leg. Spearing was fortunate not to be badly injured and Cabaye should have been sent off. Carroll endured a horror moment in the 65th minute, failing to collect when put clear by Adam. But he made a telling, if peculiar, contribution to Liverpool's second goal. Seeing Bellamy lining up a free-kick, Carroll got in the line of sight of goalkeeper Krul and when the ball passed over his shoulder he had managed to confuse the Dutchman and defender Danny Simpson to such an extent that the latter could only deflect it into the net.

**MATCH FACTS LIVERPOOL (4-4-2):** Reina 6; Johnson 7, Skrtel 7, Agger 6, Enrique 7; Adam 7 (Gerrard 59min), Spearing 6; Bellamy 8 (Kuyt 74), Henderson 6, Downing 6; Carroll 6. Subs not used: Doni, Carragher, Kelly, Maxi, Shelvey.

**Scorers:** Bellamy 29, 67, Gerrard 78. **NEWCASTLE UTD (4-4-1-1):** Krul 6; Simpson 6, Williamson 7, Colocchini 7, R Taylor 6 (Santon 46, 6); Jonas 7, Tioté 7, Cabaye 7, Obertan 6 (Sa Ameobi 84); Vuckic 6 (Ben Arfa 65); Ba 6. Subs not used: Elliott, Perch, Best, Sh Ameobi.

**Booked:** R Taylor, Gutierrez. **Scorer:** Agger 25 (og).

**Man of the match:** Craig Bellamy. **Referee:** Lee Probert 6. **Attendance:** 44,372.

## The Daily Telegraph

Gerrard cameo adds to Bellamy blast from past

Liverpool 3 Bellamy 30, 67 Gerrard 77

Newcastle United 1 Agger 25 og Att: 44,372

It had to be about a former Newcastle United striker and it was. Craig Bellamy took the headlines with two goals and a cut face, proving far more effective than Andy Carroll. Yet there were signs that Carroll could come good with more of the exceptional service provided by Steven Gerrard, who delivered a magnificent 30-minute cameo. Liverpool look so much better with Gerrard driving them on, the mid-fielder scoring a superb goal and joining Bellamy in ending Newcastle's hope of rare joy at Anfield. Chasing their first league win here since 1994, Newcastle had known they were fighting history. They had lost their previous six visits but had dared to dream at the break, the game poised at 1-;1. Alan Pardew had tweaked his team, removing Leon Best, and unleashing the highly regarded 19-year-old Slovenian, Haris Vuckic, who failed to cope with the pace of the first half. Kenny Dalglish had made changes against his old club. Missing the suspended Luis Suarez, serving his onegame ban for giving Fulham fans the finger, Liverpool had lined up in 4-;2-;3-;1 formation with the excellent Bellamy and Stewart Downing wide while Jordan Henderson pushed on towards Carroll. Henderson, making his 100th league appearance, was swiftly involved, his touches earning brief derision from the visiting fans for his Sunderland roots. The Toon Army, who had enlisted Big Bird and the Honey Monster amid the usual striped and shirtless, almost did not know where to begin booing: there was Henderson and the former Middlesbrough winger, Downing, not to mention three old boys, Jose Enrique, Bellamy and Carroll. All eyes had inevitably been on Carroll, scorer of 31 goals in 80 league appearances for Newcastle. The tall striker, whose every touch was urged on by Liverpool supporters, was involved in a promising early move, ushering Bellamy down the left. The Welshman sent Enrique through on the overlap, and his low cross was perfectly placed for Downing at the far post. Unfortunately for Liverpool, Downing had checked back out again and the ball whistled harmlessly through.

Back came Liverpool again, attacking the Kop, Bellamy leading the charge down the inside-right channel before laying the ball off to Downing. He cut inside Ryan Taylor and laced a low shot which Tim Krul saved comfortably.

Liverpool had dominated possession but Newcastle have demonstrated many times this season their menace on the break, Pardew's well-drilled team taking the lead after 25 minutes. When Vuckic took a painful blow to the face, the teenager signalled frantically to Newcastle's bench. His team-mates ignored him, going for the jugular with Liverpool's defence out of position. Taylor, a boyhood Liverpool fan, lifted the ball in from the left. Yohan Cabaye flicked it on and the rest was a blur, the ball hitting Demba Ba and then Daniel Agger before going past the wrongfooted Pepe Reina. Anfield was stunned, Newcastle fans jubilant. Liverpool responded, drawing level within four minutes. Having eluded Cabaye, Enrique's cross from the left arrived at the feet of Charlie Adam, who glided past Jonas Gutierrez before drilling the ball back in. It hit Cheik Tioté and bounced out to Bellamy, whose response was instant, the ball flying low from 15 yards past Danny Simpson on the line. Liverpool were now in the mood, Martin Skrtel meeting Bellamy's corner with a flicked header just wide. Then Jay Spearing, impressing in the centre, drilled a pass to the lively Downing on the right but he failed to pick out Carroll, whose choice of runs rarely paid off.

Liverpool looked for a second as the new half unfolded. Adam muscled his way 40 yards deep into Newcastle's half until Mike Williamson intervened. Controversy then ensued. Spearing flew in, in his usual over-exuberant style and Cabaye left his foot in, catching the Liverpoolmid-fielder on the ankle. The Newcastle man could easily have been sent off by Lee Probert. Cabaye somehow escaped.

Spearing was able to resume. Just before the hour, Anfield cheered in delight as Cabaye sent a free kick into the Kop and Liverpool's delight increased when Gerrard arrived, replacing Adam. Henderson dropped back alongside Spearing, allowing Gerrard to push on. Still Liverpool pushed and probed. Still they looked like 10 men trying to work out how to bring the best out of Carroll. Gerrard burst down the right, curling in a superb cross but Carroll failed to escape Williamson. Two minutes later, Carroll should have scored but his lack of confidence was palpable. Gerrard lifted in another magnificent ball, perfectly designed to avoid Newcastle's centre-halves. Here surely, in front of the Newcastle fans, was a moment for Carroll to savour but his first touch was clumsy and the ball fell through, almost sheepishly, to Krul. Newcastle fans cackled away.

Not for long. When Tioté was penalised for a challenge on Agger, Liverpool were awarded a free kick 25 yards out. Bellamy took charge. Carroll dropped off the wall and Simpson and Krul seemed confused by his presence, allowing Bellamy's fierce free kick to sweep past them. Newcastle had just made a change, removing Vuckic for Hatem Ben Arfa, attempting to connect more between midfield and Ba. Cabaye played a fine ball through to Ba, who brilliantly turned the ball past Reina but there was Skrtel, somehow hooking the ball clear.

Down the other end, Gerrard swept in another cross that Carroll met firmly, showing more of his old Newcastle swagger, and crashing a header against the bar. Newcastle's old strikers were the centre of attention, Bellamy sustaining a cut to his head after a collision with Fabrizio Colocchini.

There was more. Released by Henderson, Gerrard glided in from the left and scored from the tightest of angles, condemning Newcastle to further misery here.

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## THE INDEPENDENT

### Sublime Gerrard shows Carroll how it is done

Naturally those who had travelled down from Tyneside taunted him with chants of "Shearer" but the most telling question that rang out from the away end was: "Who are you?" After what was Andy Carroll's match of the season there is still no answer. He is not Alan Shearer and is likely never to be. He is still to prove he is not Garry Birtles whose extraordinary promise dulled and faded the moment he exchanged Nottingham Forest for Manchester United in 1980.

A former Newcastle player did decide this match but it was Craig Bellamy, and there was a hero's reception but it was reserved for Steven Gerrard, who came off the bench to score the goal that put this match beyond Newcastle's reach and propelled **Liverpool** to within touching distance of the Champions League places.

As he had against Blackburn on Boxing Day, Carroll came aching close to a breakthrough, driving a header from Gerrard's deep cross against the bar. "You couldn't score in a brothel" chanted the away end, unfairly at the man who had earned Newcastle a still unspent [pounds sterling]35m last January.

In contrast, a ball played over the top found him in space and in front of goal. Shearer would have buried it instinctively. The big, shy boy from the Team Valley missed his kick completely. Sometimes he looks irresistible, sometimes he looks hopeless and sometimes both in the same game.

The last occasion the grand old stadium had staged a **Liverpool** match on a Friday night was the May evening on which Arsenal came to face the champions of England needing to claim a two-goal victory to take the championship. When they did so in the final minute, the cameras zeroed in on the beaten manager with Brian Moore's words echoing: "And Dalglish just stands there."

Last night Dalglish once more stood on the Anfield touchline for the last time in a year which for him has been as extraordinary as 1989, if not quite so acutely painful. He had returned to his greatest love and reversed the process of managed decline **Liverpool** appeared to have accepted. Whatever happens in the next six months, he has been one of the football men of 2011. If Gerrard remarked afterwards he had endured a "terrible year", for his manager it has been one to remember.

However, he was still standing there, arms folded, when for the second successive match **Liverpool** fell behind to a self-inflicted wound. Against Blackburn it had been Charlie Adam's outstretched leg that had turned the ball past his own goalkeeper; now it was Daniel Agger's shoulder that beat Pepe Reina.

After 25 minutes the ball was swung in by Ryan Taylor, who was unable to cope with Stewart Downing and was withdrawn during the interval. It came from the left and aimed at Yohan Cabaye, from whom it took the merest touch towards Demba Ba, who was so closely marked by Agger that the two men were pressed together. The ball struck the Dane's shoulder and deflected past a hopelessly stranded keeper.

The only man on the field who was not aware of what had happened was young Haris Vuckic, the teenage Slovene who had just received a drive full in the face from Glen Johnson and was walking off for treatment when Newcastle took the lead.

It was not to last for long. There were three former Newcastle players on the sodden pitch and Bellamy was always the likeliest scorer. The visitors' defence had half-cleared a cross from another of their other former employees, Jose Enrique, and the ball fell to Adam, who sent in a low, punishingly-hard cross that Cheick Tiot[c] deflected towards Bellamy standing on the edge of the area. Unlike Carroll's future on Merseyside, his shot brooked no argument.

His second goal in the 67th minute did feature an intervention by Carroll. As the Welshman drove in a free-kick, the striker, standing intelligently between the wall and Tim Krul, attempted to meet it with a flick of his pony-tailed head. He missed but it was enough to put off the Dutchman. **Liverpool** have been defied by several heroic goalkeeping performances but Krul's fumble gave them a sight of victory that was confirmed by Gerrard's sublime finish from a tight angle 11 minutes later.

By then Bellamy had been substituted after a clash with Fabricio Colocini that left his chin a mess and required four stitches above the eye. As he went off he confronted Alan Pardew. The Newcastle manager said: "I told him: 'I don't know what you are having a go at me for - I didn't elbow you.'" Bellamy who has made a habit of scoring against Newcastle, was rather more gracious after the final whistle. Memories of Cabaye's studs-up tackle on Jay Spearing are likely to linger a little longer.

The only real question over Newcastle's remodelled, French-flavoured side is their ability to score more than a single goal against good teams. When Ba swept the ball past Reina it seemed they had done but for a fabulous, full-stretch clearance off the line from Martin Skrtel. In the longer term Newcastle might be helped by Carroll coming home. Shearer did.

## DAILY MIRROR

### DING DONG BELLS

THE SCRIPT was preordained. A former Magpie, now dressed in Red, to deliver the killer blow to Newcastle.

But it was not Andy Carroll who shot down Alan Pardew's men.

His nightmare goes on and on. Now five goals in 29 appearances for Liverpool, denied by poor touch and the woodwork.

Instead, on cue, up stepped Craig Bellamy, the free signing who showed Kenny Dalglish's bigmoney buys what it means to play for Liverpool.

With Luis Suarez missing, Dalglish needed Bellamy to bring his fire and brimstone to the party after Daniel Agger's own goal raised Tyneside hopes of another away triumph. A goal in each half before departing with blood streaming from a cut above his left eye made Bellamy the stand-out performer.

But the Kop reserved its biggest cheer for skipper Steven Gerrard, who came off the bench to spark the Merseysiders and then slot home the goal that finished their first comeback win of the second Dalglish era.

Without Suarez, Carroll, jeered onto the pitch by the travelling Newcastle fans, was always going to be the centre of attention.

But it was Bellamy who caught the eye. He foraged down the left flank to destabilise Pardew's side from the outset.

That approach play did not lead to any end-product however, with Tim Krul hardly over-extended.

Agger strode forward to pull his left-footer wide from 25 yards, before Jose Enrique - the third former Magpie on the pitch - rolled across only for Stewart Downing, the furthest advanced in red, to move the wrong way at the vital moment.

Newcastle, with Demba Ba isolated up top, were happy to sit and hit on the counter.

Indeed, for 25 minutes, Pepe Reina was a spectator - before he found his net breached.

Ryan Taylor's ball in from the left was hardly special but Yohan Cabaye got the first flick before the abrupt change of direction left Reina utterly beaten.

Ba was initially credited but subsequent analysis showed the Senegalese making no claim for a goal which had to be debited against Agger's right shoulder.

Within four minutes, though, Liverpool were back on terms.

Enrique's latest centre reached Adam, who worked his way near the goal-line before skidding across, with Cheik Tiot only able to prod out and allow Bellamy to drill through the pack of black and white shirts.

Suddenly life inside Anfield, Martin Skrtel close to completing a rapid turnaround from Bellamy's near-post corner while bookings for Jonas Gutierrez and Taylor were indicative of where the pressure was coming from.

But there was little else to animate the crowd before the arrival of Gerrard just before the hour. The returning skipper almost made an instant impact, his raking ball in demanding more than Carroll, blocked off by Mike Williamson, was able to give.

And on 64 minutes Liverpool should have gone in front.

Again it was Gerrard with the ball in, Carroll eluded Williamson but with the goal begging, his attempted control simply spooned into Krul's hands.

Not for long. Tiot brought down Agger and Carroll made a nuisance of himself as Bellamy prepared to y yr strike, although it was Danny Simpson who got in Krul's way when the free-kick speared over the Newcastle wall and went in.

Relief and delight, although it needed a brilliant goal-line clearance by Skrtel, after Ba dinked Cabaye's pass over Reina, to preserve the advantage.

Carroll smashed a header against the bar from the third tracer-bullet cross by Gerrard, who soon demonstrated how to take a chance.

Jordan Henderson's clever ball sent Gerrard in through the inside left channel, his exquisite finish ending any doubt.

LIVERPOOL: Reina 6, Johnson 6, Skrtel 6, Agger 6, Jose Enrique 7, Downing 7, Henderson 5, Spearing 6, Adam 6 (Gerrard, 59, 7), Bellamy 8 (Kuyt 74, 6), Carroll 5. NEWCASTLE: Krul 7, Simpson 5, Williamson 6, Colocini 7, Taylor 5 (Santon, 46, 6), Obertan 5 (Sa Ameobi, 85, 5), Tiot 6, Vuckic 5 (Ben Arfa, 65, 6), Cabaye 6, Gutierrez 6, Ba 6. REFEREE: Lee Probert.

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### Steven Gerrard back with a bang as LFC end 2011 in style

THERE was a high five from his manager and a standing ovation from a jubilant crowd. Liverpool FC have got their talisman back leading the charge and hope springs eternal at Anfield. Steven Gerrard described 2011 as "absolute torture" following his injury woes but he ended it on a glorious high last night after a match-winning cameo against Newcastle United.

This was Gerrard back on his stage, pulling the strings and inspiring those around him. He was only on the pitch for 30 minutes but he grabbed control of a contest which was threatening to go the same way as so many others at Anfield this season. Gerrard made the difference with an outstanding all-round display which he capped with a classy finish to round off a morale boosting victory.

It came after Craig Bellamy's double against his old club had helped the Reds hit back from Daniel Agger's unfortunate own goal. Liverpool Football Club is barely recognisable today from the mess it was in at the start of 2011.

This was a year that kicked off with 10,000 empty seats for the visit of Bolton.

They were a mediocre team flirting with a relegation battle and playing a dour brand of football under a manager fans had no faith in. The return of the King changed everything. Kenny Dalglish transformed the Reds' fortunes and with the financial muscle of owners Fenway Sports Group he has put the club on the path back to recapturing former glory. But Dalglish has had to do it without the luxury afforded to other Reds bosses over the past 13 years – a fully fit Gerrard.

With his captain back spearheading Liverpool's push for honours in the second half of the season, there is every reason to believe that the frustration of recent months will be washed away.

Liverpool will go into 2012 on a high, right in the hunt for Champions League qualification and eyeing a two-pronged assault on the domestic Cups.

After the recent stalemates against Wigan and Blackburn, this was a huge result but for a long time it looked like being Groundhog Day. For 25 minutes the Reds dominated possession and territory but never threatened to hurt Newcastle.

Daniel Agger and Charlie Adam failed to hit the target from long range, while Stewart Downing was easily denied by Tim Krul's low save.

There was a nervousness about Liverpool's play and it contributed to the visitors grabbing a shock lead with their first meaningful attack.

After the Reds conceded the ball cheaply, Ryan Taylor whipped in a cross from the left, Yohan Cabaye flicked it on and a deflection off Agger's shoulder left Pepe Reina helpless. Having scored at Anfield for the first time since 2004, the Toon sensed a first away win over the Reds since 1994.

Six home draws in nine games have tested fans' patience this season and the threat of more points being squandered loomed large again.

When Adam tamely ploughed a promising free-kick into the wall the Kop vented its anger. The Reds were in need of an urgent response and thankfully it arrived within four minutes of falling behind. Adam's cross was half cleared by Cheik Tiote but only into the path of Bellamy who clinically found the bottom corner. Relief engulfed Anfield and the Reds could have led before the break. Bellamy turned provider with Skrtel rising to meet his corner but the defender's header flashed just wide. Five minutes into the second half Liverpool should have been handed a numerical advantage. Jay Spearing, who impressed in front of the back four, was the victim of a horrific studs up tackle from Cabaye which left the midfielder writhing in agony on the turf.

It was a potential ankle breaker and a nailed on red card but to the Reds' disgust referee Lee Probert took no action against the French international.

Liverpool lacked a spark in the final third but the introduction of Gerrard for Adam just before the hour mark changed all that.

The captain made an instant impression, picking out Andy Carroll with military precision. It was a glorious chance for the £35million frontman to end his two-month goal drought against his boyhood club. But Carroll's first touch deserted him and the ball trickled harmlessly through to Krul.

It mattered little as in the 67th minute the Reds were in front. As Bellamy sized up a 25-yard free-kick, Danny Simpson bizarrely decided to dart back to protect the post. Carroll followed him back and caused sufficient panic that when Bellamy curled it goalwards Simpson got in his keeper's way and could only help it past Krul. It was the Welshman's fifth goal in just seven starts since his return to the club from Manchester City and it meant for the first time since September Liverpool had scored more than once in a game at Anfield.

There was a major scare when Ba clipped a shot over the advancing Reina but the outstanding Skrtel got back to hook it off the line.

With Gerrard stamping his authority on the contest, Liverpool finished with a flourish. The skipper once again put it on a plate for Carroll, who soared above Mike Williamson but rattled the bar. Dirk Kuyt replaced Bellamy, who departed to have four stitches in a head wound after a clash with Fabricio Colocchini, and the points were wrapped up 12 minutes from time.

Spearing found Jordan Henderson whose neat lay-off sent Gerrard scampering into the box. The angle looked virtually impossible but he expertly slipped a shot through Krul's legs.

Anfield erupted. Liverpool have got their leader back and with Gerrard in this kind of form the Reds will approach 2012 with relish.



MISERY on the Mersey - but don't say you did not see any of this coming.

If anything, Newcastle United are consistent when it comes to trips to Anfield – they usually lose and 2011 has proved no exception.

Sadly, losing to the Kop side has become an inevitable experience with no Premier League wins at this venue since 1994.

Painfully, this one was intertwined with the former player curse coming back to haunt the Magpies yet again as Craig Bellamy seemed to take pleasure in punishing sloppy defending by the black-and-whites.

The only salt Liverpool did not rub in Newcastle wounds was the sight of striker Andy Carroll netting against his former team-mates.

It is easy to forget Newcastle actually snatched the lead last night – but even that joyful moment lasted a mere five minutes.

It was an evening in which United – who did not win a single corner – could and should have put a shaky Liverpool side under more pressure, yet not for the first time Newcastle came a cropper against the Scouse outfit.

In a game which lacked any real quality, though, even the Reds had to turn to Steven Gerrard to seal the game after Bellamy had been given two gift-wrapped chances to pile on the agony.

Yes, it was another one of those nights for the Mags.

Pardew had sprung something of a surprise by including Haris Vuckic in his starting line-up as Newcastle looked to break a Premier League hoodoo at Anfield. Hesitation was all part of the ploy for Newcastle in the opening stages as they attempted to frustrate the Merseysiders.

Equally as frustrating was Newcastle's wasteful use of the ball in the opening 20 minutes as a few over-hit passes handed the ball back to Liverpool on a plate at times.

In a scrappy start to the game it took until the 20th minute for the first shot on target to arrive, but after Stewart Downing motored past Ryan Taylor his effort was gathered easily by Krul.

It summed up the opening stages in many ways. Quite simply, Liverpool offered nothing to scare United.

That is why this was a squandered opportunity for Newcastle.

The Tynesiders' first attempt did come on 25 minutes and it was worth the wait – despite its scrappy nature.

Ryan Taylor whipped the ball in from the left and slight touches from Cabaye then Ba in the box resulted in the ball finally deflecting in off Daniel Agger.

Yet this goal-packed Premier League fixture is never a dull affair and within four minutes Liverpool levelled when Bellamy came back to haunt United after Cheik Tiote failed to make a routine clearance efficiently.

Nevertheless, the black-and-whites have endured worst first halves at Anfield and the two sides went in level at the break.

The rain may have eased off in the second period but, up until the hour mark, the contest was still a relatively damp and dull affair.

No surprise, then, that failed former Newcastle boss Kenny Dalglish turned to his talisman Gerrard.

Pardew in turn attempted to illuminate the game by introducing Hatem Ben Arfa. However, it was the pocket-sized menace of Bellamy who put the Reds back in control at Anfield when his curling set-piece was zipped past Krul.

The game should have been done and dusted when Gerrard's right-wing cross was headed against the bar by Carroll for what should have been a goal against his old club. Instead, it was down to Gerrard to put the lid on what turned into a routine victory for Liverpool.

The year ends on a bum note for Pardew and his players.

True enough, the Magpies sit in seventh spot checking out of the year and, while 30 points is a scenario many would have settled for in August, this was still a night in which Newcastle's team bus pulled out of the Anfield car park containing its fair share of regretful expressions.

Ryder's verdict: Same old story at Anfield.